

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 June 2017

by J D Westbrook BSc(Econ) Hons, MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 28 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/Z/17/3173332

Martin & Co, 16 Howardsgate, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6BQ

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 against a refusal to grant express consent.
 - The appeal is made by Martin & Co Welwyn against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2016/2641/ADV, dated 12 December 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 February 2017.
 - The advertisement proposed is the installation of fascia signage and a projecting sign.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and express consent for the display of the fascia signage and projecting sign as applied for is granted. The consent is for five years from the date of this decision and is subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the effect of the signage on the visual amenities, character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area.

Procedural Matter

3. The proposed signage was in place at the time of my site visit. The signage comprises a fascia sign and a projecting sign. It would appear that there has been some confusion over the size of lettering on the fascia signage. The signage, as existing, appears to conform to the details on the application form and the plans as available to me. Email correspondence between the Council and the appellant indicates that the Council has no objection to the fascia signage, but only to the projecting sign. I concur with this view and I have dealt with this appeal from the perspective of the projecting sign only.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a retail unit situated on the southern side of Howardsgate, close to its western end and its junction with Parkway. Howardsgate, in common with most of the town centre, lies within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area (CA). There is a wide landscaped area separating the south side of Howardsgate from the north side, such that the appeal site relates directly only to the south side. This is a commercial area with two main terraces of retail and other related uses separated by Wigmore South, a pedestrianized street that is also largely commercial in nature.
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5. No 16 Howardsgate is part of a short terrace of 4 units, comprising Nos 16–22, with a large HSBC unit immediately to the west. Of these units, the bank has a large illuminated projecting sign in a prominent position. The shop unit adjacent to the appeal property has a smaller, non-illuminated sign. There is a large number of projecting signs further along Howardsgate, many of them illuminated. There are further illuminated projecting signs on properties along Wigmores South. The degree of illumination for the signs at No 16, indicated on the application form, indicates a relatively modest lighting level.
6. The Council's adopted Supplementary Design Guidance document (SDG) identifies Nos 16-22 Howardsgate as "shopfronts with stonework surrounds", where the units have stonework detailing at a high level above the shopfront. In such circumstances, signs should be incorporated within the existing shopfront design, in order to be subservient to the overall design of the building and to ensure that they do not impinge on the stonework surround. In this case, the projecting sign is located at fascia level, below the stonework detailing, and is of a size that harmonises with the fascia depth. On this basis, it does not conflict with guidance given in the SDG.
7. The Council contends that the sign projects an excessive amount. However, given the varied size, number, and designs of illuminated and non-illuminated signs along Howardsgate, I do not consider in this case that the sign at the appeal property appears excessive in size or out of proportion in the context of its surroundings. As noted above, it does not conflict with the requirements of the Council's SDG. Neither does it conflict with Policy D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, which requires development to maintain the character of the existing area. I find, therefore, that the signage at the appeal property is not harmful to the visual amenities of the area and that it may, therefore, be said to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.

J D Westbrook

INSPECTOR